

Good morning. My name is Mark Baroness, and most of you probably don't know me. I am really quite fortunate in that I have what many people lack: two loving parents; a wonderful wife; two great teenage sons; even, a law school education that has afforded me the opportunity to represent many famous people, from Olympic Gold Medalists to individuals you may watch every night on television. So what could the downside?

Everyday I deal with a neurological disease called Multiple Sclerosis or MS. For those who may not know what the disease is, it is basically your own body attacking the protective covering of your nerves and your brain. The end result ranges from someone who looks relatively healthy like me, to an individual committed to a wheel chair for life. My disease can strike anyone at anytime. There is no cure.

I used to be, and in fact still am, the type of individual that does not like to take medicine. I always viewed myself as strong enough to cope with any problem. Until my MS. I consider myself fortunate that through the work of numerous physicians and pharmaceutical researchers that there are now 5 medications available which help to hopefully forestall the effects of MS. I feel unfortunate that the most important of these medicines has to be injected three times a week into my body, usually in my stomach.

Most of you have probably never self administered an injection into your stomach. The medicine I inject looks like this. A simple clear liquid that feels like a bee sting every time it is injected.

As you might imagine, an abdominal injection can be the source of considerable anxiety. It reminds me every time about my disease. It reminds me that I used to be a trial lawyer and no longer am because of my memory lapses. It reminds that that while I sit here I have no feeling in my left foot. It reminds me that frequently, I feel depressed when I used to be quite upbeat.

My disease is stressful enough. The *last* thing I want to consider when I inject myself is whether or not the medicine in my syringe is real- or safe. Here is another syringe. I filled it up with water. I could put something in it to duplicate the burning I experience during an injection, maybe a form of acid. My guess is that without a chemical analysis none of us would be able to tell the difference.

I experience life as both a patient and as a patient advocate who has grown close to many people over the years who depend on significant doses of medicine every day to cope with their medical conditions. I believe that one of the greatest threats we are currently facing in this country is the prospect of importation of drugs through Canada.

Quite frankly, I am shocked that the government is even considering such a proposal. At a time that when we are increasing security on almost every front imaginable, and you can barely walk around Washington D.C. without stumbling over barricades intended to make us safer, we are considering the prospect of loosening the

controls on our prescription drug supply. Every night on the news we hear the concerns over what information our government had in advance of the horrible events of 9/11. With all of our resources and intelligence, how could such a tragedy occur? The answer remains unknown because the information that the 9/11 commission has is unclear.

The information that you have is crystal clear. The FDA has determined that it cannot certify the safety of the millions of medicines that pass through Canada. For that matter, Canadian healthcare representatives won't do it either. Why? The risk is far too great. If the FAA tells me not to fly on a particular kind of plane, I do not need to experience a crash to heed the warning.

Do you remember the panic a few months when a cow from Canada somehow was tainted with Mad Cow disease? There was almost a panic. Over what? One bad cow? Nobody got hurt, right? You did not hear members of Congress saying, we need lower beef prices and nobody got hurt.

People will literally put their lives at risk every single time they reach for a drug imported from Canada. These drugs could have been made in a back room in Pakistan, or Iran, or China, with little in the way of monitoring or regulations. They may be manufactured or packaged under unsanitary and unsecure conditions, where anything could be added to them, or they may contain no active ingredient at all. My medicine arrives packed in dry ice from the pharmacy. The effectiveness of the drug is destroyed if it is not refrigerated and stored properly. I presently do not question the integrity of my medicines.

This problem won't just impact those who go through Canada for their drugs or those who buy them off of the Internet. If large-scale importation becomes law, there will be a massive flow of drugs through Canada from all over the world – and many of them will no doubt be counterfeit. There will be no way of telling which drugs are real and safe and which ones are bogus. This is not the case of buying a fake Louis Vuitton purse. We will all be at risk every time we reach for the medicine cabinet or stand in line at Giant or Safeway.

Maybe some people can afford to take that risk, or they are willing to accept it. Maybe they don't take all that many medications – and even for those people, I think that's a foolish risk to take with your health. But for me, I'll be playing Russian roulette four times a day – every day – because that's how many medications I have to take to manage my disease. It isn't smart for any of us to risk our health even a single time. But for people like me– this is just an unacceptable proposition.

We have already suffered enough to have the diseases we have. Right now, I have the assurance that my medicine is the safest in the world and that it will do what my doctors intend for it to do. If this wrongheaded concept of importation becomes law, the situation will change dramatically.

One of your mandates from Sec. Thompson is to ‘Identify the liability protections, if any, that should be in place if importation is permitted for entities within the pharmaceutical distribution chain.’ If we are so confident that there is no risk, why the concern?

While I understand that the goal of importation is to lower the cost of medicines, I know that the safety problems that will be created by importation will be much worse than the current situation. Cheaper medicines are not a good deal if they aren’t real or if they kill. How many of you could look the family of a dead child in the face and say, “I am sorry that your child is dead, but I really did the right thing in letting these medicines in.” The real cost will be measured in lives lost because of dangerous or ineffective drugs.

So, when you comply with the dictate of the Secretary and “Assess the potential short- and long-term impacts on drug prices and prices for consumers associated with importing drugs from Canada and other countries”, don’t just think about the money. Think about whether you would want one of your own loved ones to take a counterfeit drug and become a statistic